PITTA

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MYSURU BIRDING SCENE
Report: Mysuru, Aug-Oct 2021

Text & Photos: Aditya Rao

A scene at Narsambhudhi Lake

Thanks to remote working and the waning of the Covid pandemic, I chanced upon the opportunity to work from my native city of Mysuru. Birding during my trips back to Mysuru has always been incidental and I have never had a real opportunity to do some serious birding. Thanks to my extended stay during the pandemic, I had the great pleasure to observe and document almost 120 bird species during this monsoon season (Aug 15 – Oct 15, 2021).

Mysuru itself boasts of a very active birding community and some extremely serious birders who have been contributing over the last few decades via Mysore Nature (https://www.Mysorenature.org/). I was particularly impressed by an ardent Mysuru birder Mr. Shivaprakash Adavanne who has, over the years, helped with building a fantastic map of Mysuru birding scene. Mysuru is known for its serene natural setup with great rivers like Cauvery, Kabini and Hemavathi converging; the meeting of the Eastern and Western Ghats thus creating great many wetland and scrub forests – ecological prefectures that support extensive avifauna. As per eBird, there have been close to 411 birds documented till date from this region.

Eurasian Spoonbill, Grey Heron & Darter

One area I have been visiting often and feel is actually a bigger hotspot than recorded is the Narsambhudhi Lake (near Nanjangudu, around 25km south of Mysuru City – a semi-wetland with scrub forest and extensive cultivation around the periphery. I was able to observe around 104 birds in just 12 visits. The list includes the following birds:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	53	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*
2	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*	54	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
3	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	55	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
4	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	56	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
5	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	57	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
6	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	58	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
7	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	59	White-cheeked Barbet	*Megalaima viridis*
8	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	60	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*
9	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	61	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
10	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	62	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*
11	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	63	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
12	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	64	Spot-breasted Fantail	*Rhipidura albogularis*
13	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	65	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*
14	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	66	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*
15	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	67	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
16	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	68	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
17	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	69	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*
18	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	70	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*
19	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	71	Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*
20	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	72	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*
21	Tricolored Munia	*Lonchura malacca*	73	Jerdon's Bushlark	*Mirafra affinis*
22	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	74	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
23	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	75	Jungle Prinia	*Prinia sylvatica*
24	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	76	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
25	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	77	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*
26	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	78	Sykes's Warbler	*Iduna rama*
27	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	79	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*
28	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	80	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
29	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	81	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*
30	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	82	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
31	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	83	Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*
32	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	84	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
33	Spot-billed Pelican	*Pelecanus philippensis*	85	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
34	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	86	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*
35	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	87	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
36	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	88	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
37	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	89	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
38	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	90	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
39	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	91	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*
40	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*	92	Malabar Starling	*Sturnia blythii*
41	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	93	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
42	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*	94	Jungle Myna	*Acridotheres fuscus*
43	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	95	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
44	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	96	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
45	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*	97	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
46	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	98	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
47	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	99	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
48	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	100	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
49	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	101	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
50	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	102	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
51	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*	103	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
52	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	104	White-rumped Munia	*Lonchura striata*

Malabar Starling

I also had the pleasure of reporting from this place a first sighting of a pair of Malabar Starlings.

Painted Stork juvenile (L) & adult (R)

In addition to this, it supports a good number of water birds like Painted Storks, Asian Openbills, Eurasian Spoonbills and Spot-billed Pelicans. Also, it is home to regular winter migrants like Sykes, Booted and Blyth's Reed Warblers.

Other interesting sightings

Apart from this, I have had many interesting observations in and around Mysuru. One particular scene was with many (more than 100) Coppersmith Barbets and Yellow-footed Green Pigeons making merry on an early October morning on a heavily fruiting Ficus tree.

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

Coppersmith Barbet

Also, the hard to photograph Blue-faced Malkoha gave me a generous pose for a few seconds, allowing me to click a nice little picture.

Blue-faced Malkoha

Important note on conservation

Apart from birding, the onus lies on us of being responsible birders and promoting conservation. Unfortunately, like so many other areas that we are all aware of, Narsambhudhi is no different – human growth and destruction of habitat is happening with impunity. Some serious issues that I have noted include overfishing, logging by villagers of dead wood which I believe are great nesting areas, and regular cattle and sheep grazing. I have also noticed some wire-traps, which indicates that some traditional poachers are still lurking around. I have reported this to the local district Forest and Fisheries departments; unfortunately, it seems to work for a few days and then these activities get back in full swing.

I have, in just these two months, noticed subtle changes for the worse. I am working with Rotary International, Nanjangudu Club to put up notices and create awareness within the village panchayat and help in their conservation efforts. It is a drop in the ocean indeed, but I do hope it will have an impact in the long run so that the future will have an opportunity to see this great diversity of avifauna. I will provide more information at the next available opportunity if I am able to make any headway.

Some other photos taken during the trips:

Pale-billed Flowerpecker

Cinereous Tit

Black-rumped Flameback

White-rumped Munia

Black-winged Stilt

Western Yellow Wagtail

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)

Terek Sandpiper (Pazhaverkadu, Pulicat, March 03, 2020)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae
Genus: *Xenus*
Species: *X. cinereus*
Size: 22-25 cm

Description & distribution: The Terek Sandpiper is a small-sized wader and the only member of the genus *Xenus*. Named after the Terek River near the Caspian Sea, where it was first observed, it is a monotypic species and no subspecies are recognized. It is slightly larger than the Common Sandpiper and is easily identified by its long, gently upcurved bill. As the specific name *cinereus* (ash grey) implies, it has grey upperparts, face and breast, the belly is whitish and the legs and feet are dirty orange-yellow. The black bill has a yellow base, and it sometimes shows a white supercilium. In flight, conspicuous white trailing edges to the wings are visible.

The Terek Sandpiper breeds in the Arctic tundra and taiga areas from Finland east across Siberia to the Kolyma River, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, and winters south to the muddy coastal areas of eastern Africa, Arabian peninsula, Indian subcontinent, south-east Asia and Australia. There have been occasional reports from western Europe, and in recent years, from Alaska and nearby areas.

Habitat & behaviour: The Terek Sandpiper is usually seen along with Ruddy Turnstones, Stints and Plovers on coastal areas, mangrove forests, lakes, estuaries, marshes, intertidal mudflats and salt pans, between 0-100m altitude. In fact, it is closely related to the Spotted and Common Sandpipers, it is believed to be quite possible that the Terek Sandpiper may mate with them and produce hybrid offspring. It forages in small groups of 5-25, but usually scattered along the coast, at high and low tide, and feeds mainly on invertebrates, marine insects and larvae, beetles, flies, crustaceans, molluscs, arachnids and some seeds. It catches its mobile prey in a distinctive manner, chasing after it as the water recedes, and often running to the water to wash its prey before consuming it. It may also sometimes probe the wet ground for worms.

Its flight call is a clear, fluty *tjiy-tjiy* or *dwitt-dwitt*, softer than the Common Redshank and Common Sandpiper; it also utters a trilling *du-du-du-du* or a softer *hu-hu-hu*. The alarm call is a sharp *tu-li*.

Nesting: The Terek Sandpiper breeds between May and August in most of its breeding range, in small colonies, and is monogamous. The typical nest is usually a shallow scrape lined with grass or plant matter, on open flat ground near water and sparse vegetation. The male performs an aerial or ground display during breeding, with fluttering wings and raised tail, while loudly singing a melodious whistled *klueeu* or a long musical *prerrr*. The usual clutch consists of 2-5 eggs, generally buff or cream with black or dark brown spots and blotches. Incubation is done by the female, but parental duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The Terek Sandpiper is known as *'Uppukothi ullan'* or *'Kadakarai ullan'* in Tamil, *'Terek manaloothi'* in Malayalam and *'Tutvari', 'Chanchal'* or *'Dhariyayi'* in Gujarati.

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

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(From Facebook, November 13, 2021)

We wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year 2022

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